United Nations S/2014/179

Security Council

Distr.: General
12 March 2014
English
Original: French

Letter dated 11 March 2014 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit the attached letter, dated 6 March 2014, from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, forwarding a progress report on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, covering the period from 1 November 2013 to 31 January 2014 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

Letter dated 6 March 2014 from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English]

In accordance with Security Council resolutions 1386 (2001) and 2120 (2013), I attach a report on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force covering the period from 1 November 2013 to 31 January 2014 (see enclosure). I would appreciate your making this report available to the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Anders Fogh **Rasmussen**

Enclosure

Quarterly report to the Security Council on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force

I. Introduction

Overview

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to the request under Security Council resolution 2120 (2013), informs the Security Council on the progress of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), covering the period from 1 November 2013 to 31 January 2014.

2. Throughout the reporting period, ISAF continued to assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

3. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) welcomes the continuing commitment to this mission of a large number of United Nations Member States, which remains key to mission success.

4. The ISAF campaign is focused on preparing the Afghan National Security Forces to assume full security responsibility by the end of 2014. The fielding of the force is nearly complete, but progress is not yet fully self-sustainable. ISAF reoriented towards the development of the sustainability of the Afghan forces and is seeking to close remaining capability gaps and developmental shortfalls in critical areas such as aviation, intelligence and logistics.

5. Since the last reporting period, the overall positive reputation of the Afghan security forces has been maintained among the Afghan people. The Afghan population views the forces as capable of providing security to Afghanistan although there is a recognition that they still require coalition assistance.

6. The Afghan security forces continue to demonstrate their competence to secure the upcoming election and political transition. In the reporting period, they proved capable of securing the Afghan people and high-visibility events such as the Loya Jirga held in November 2013.

7. Progress has been made in developing the institutions, systems and processes necessary to sustain a modern, professional army and police force. At the level of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, ISAF focus areas include planning, programming, budgeting, acquisition and manpower processes.

8. Overall ISAF redeployment remains on track. The ground lines of communication in the area of operation support the redeployment effort. NATO headquarters diplomatic efforts have led to the signing of transit agreements with countries bordering Afghanistan, thus effectively securing the northern and southern redeployment ground lines of communication.

ISAF force level

9. As at 31 January 2014, just under 60,000 ISAF personnel were in theatre, provided by 28 NATO countries and 21 non-NATO (partner) countries. ISAF is engaged in reposturing the force to accommodate for reductions in force levels and to prepare for a post-2014 mission, contingent upon Afghanistan's signing of the United States bilateral security agreement and the NATO status-of-forces agreement.

ISAF casualties

10. Since the Afghan security forces assumed lead responsibility for security nationwide, ISAF casualties have continued to decrease. During this reporting period, ISAF casualties have decreased by approximately 50 per cent.

Civilian casualties

11. In this quarter, the number of insurgent-caused civilian casualties has increased when compared to the same quarter in 2013. The overwhelming majority of civilian casualties are caused by the insurgents' indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices and complex attacks, including the high-profile attacks in Kabul at the beginning of 2014.

12. Overall, reducing the number of civilian casualties remains a paramount objective for both ISAF and the Government of Afghanistan. Civilian casualty tracking and mitigation measures have been established within the Government. ISAF continues to assist by mentoring and monitoring the full implementation of the Afghan civilian casualty mitigation system.

13. The number of civilian casualties caused by ISAF has continued to decrease following the assumption by the Afghan security forces of lead responsibility for security nationwide. ISAF and the Afghan forces maintain a concerted effort to minimize civilian casualties by reviewing directives and operational procedures, promoting transparency, and building the capability of the Afghan forces to effectively conduct counter-improvised explosive device operations.

Transition

14. Transition remains on track for completion in 2014. The Afghan security forces planned and executed the majority of operations during the reporting period, with ISAF providing enabling support as requested. The Afghan forces have also facilitated voter registration efforts, setting the conditions for the upcoming elections.

II. Security situation

15. As at the end of 2013, the insurgency had been unable to achieve its stated objectives. The overall number of enemy initiated attacks in 2013 was slightly lower than the previous year. However, while Regional Commands East, North, Central and West witnessed a slight increase in enemy initiated attacks this reporting period, Regional Commands South and South-West continued to see a decline in such attacks for this quarter compared to the same period one year ago. The Afghan security forces have also managed to secure most population centres.

16. Insurgents continue to attempt high-profile attacks in Kabul and the threat of a spectacular attack remains high. However, security measures taken by the Afghan security forces in November 2013 to secure the Loya Jirga demonstrate the forces' capabilities to successfully disrupt insurgent operations and are an encouraging indicator of the capability of the Afghan forces to secure the election.

III. Afghan National Security Forces

17. The overall positive trend in progress towards professionalizing the Afghan security forces has continued since the last reporting period. They have lead responsibility for security nationwide and are on track to successfully assume full security responsibility by the end of 2014. The Afghan forces have continued to be successful, demonstrating cohesiveness and commitment as the lead security provider.

18. The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior have also made progress in both budget execution and accountability, but require further assistance in support functions, particularly in logistics and facility management. In the Afghan security forces, critical support is still required in the areas of aviation, developing the intelligence enterprise and special operations.

19. The Afghan security institutions and the Afghan security forces continue to rely on support from ISAF to mitigate key development shortfalls. Ministerial-level development shortfalls exist in logistics, acquisition and financial management; strategic plans and policy; and human resource management. In the Afghan security forces, capability development shortfalls exist in counter-improvised explosive device operations; medical; fire support coordination and delivery; and special operations capabilities, including counter-terrorism.

20. The overall perception of the Afghan security forces as an institution and their ability to provide security remains strong among the Afghan people. According to recent research, the Afghan people's perception of security remains consistent with the previous reporting period. While perceptions of the Afghan security forces remain steady, a little over half of Afghan respondents believe that they are capable but require additional resources.

IV. Civil-military interaction

Governance support

21. The active engagement of NATO with the wider international community, Afghan civil society and the Government of Afghanistan has continued throughout the reporting period. Key areas have been the negotiations over the NATO status-of-forces agreement for the planned post-2014 NATO-led train, advise and assist mission; involvement in donor support through the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework; and support to the elections upon the request of the Government.

22. Discussions on the draft text of the NATO status-of-forces agreement began in January between the NATO Senior Civilian Representative and representatives of the Government and are ongoing. An agreed NATO status-of-forces agreement will underpin the post-2014 mission.

23. The NATO Senior Civilian Representative is also closely involved in the mechanisms for current and post-2014 funding, mainly through the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board on the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. The latest meeting was held in January and the international community acknowledged the progress made in the last decade, reaffirmed its commitments to Afghanistan and urged the Government to make more efforts in key areas, such as macroeconomic stability and the fight against corruption.

24. The Afghan presidential election and the provincial council elections are key events in the near term. The Afghan security forces bear full responsibility for election security. ISAF continues to support the security forces and the Government on request, providing primarily logistical and delivery support of election materials, thus far. In January 2014, ISAF also facilitated the European Union's election monitoring exploratory mission in Kandahar and Nangarhar Provinces. Requests for support have been below anticipated levels, although it is expected that requests from the security forces will increase closer to the elections. To coordinate election-related work, ISAF has established an election support cell, which engages with the relevant government branches responsible for election security and briefs the wider international community on its role and activities.

25. Voter registration and preparations for the Afghan presidential election are largely on track and continue to be supported by ISAF. The campaigning period for the 11 registered presidential candidates began on 2 February 2014 and will end on 2 April 2014.

26. NATO is represented at wider regional forums such as the Heart of Asia and the International Contact Group. The latest meetings of both forums were held in January 2014 in New Delhi and focused on regional economic cooperation, Afghan elections, and the implementation of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Despite the need for greater implementation in many areas, these regional initiatives confirm positive support for Afghanistan.

Development support

27. The ISAF presence in the provinces continued to decrease in line with redeployment efforts. ISAF active support to development has therefore noticeably declined and will continue to decrease until the end of the mission.

28. Only three provincial reconstruction teams, in Helmand, Herat and Jawzjan, remain operational. In order to mitigate the impact of team closures, the Government must implement its provincial budgeting policy and provide effective governance and delivery of basic services to the Afghan people.

29. The Independent Directorate of Local Governance is now the leading government agency providing services previously delivered by provincial reconstruction teams. The countries supporting the remaining teams (Italy, Turkey and the United Kingdom) are cooperating with the Directorate in order to mitigate the possible risks and to ensure a smooth transition.

30. The conduct of credible, inclusive and transparent elections is important in maintaining funding from the international community.

Support to international organizations/United Nations

31. As the end of the ISAF mission approaches, the interaction and coordination between ISAF and the international community has become increasingly important. To address this, the Civil-Military Interaction Enterprise Advisory Group and the Civil-Military Coordination Enterprise Advisory Group have been created at ISAF headquarters to facilitate civil-military coordination.

V. Redeployment

32. ISAF redeployment remains on track, but the process continues to represent a challenge. Redeployment activities are fully coherent with the ISAF campaign plan, thereby optimizing the use of resources, facilities, movement infrastructure and lines of communication.

33. Personnel and equipment are currently leaving theatre at an acceptable rate, but a variety of factors, including climatic conditions, political constraints, and insurgent/criminal interdiction of redeployment consignments could adversely affect this. ISAF troop-contributing countries averaged a troop reduction of 11,400 per month during the reporting period. NATO and bilateral transit agreements are also being maintained, supported by an efficient and effective liaison officer network. Significantly, strategic airlift capacity is assessed as sufficient to mitigate constraints on the use of the ground lines of communication.

34. Freedom of movement continues to be one of the main concerns related to ISAF redeployment. While disruptions of the ground lines of communication have generally been relatively insignificant in terms of duration, this quarter, the protest of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf protest on the northern Pakistan ground lines of communication reduced significantly the transit of ISAF cargo on the route from late November 2013.

VI. Afghan-Pakistan border situation

35. Cross-border incidents decreased by approximately 40 per cent from the same period one year ago.

36. The majority of incidents occurred on the Afghan side of the border coordination zone along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Security incidents within the Afghan part of the zone increased by approximately 50 per cent during this reporting period compared to the same period one year ago. The majority of security incidents (cross-border small arms and indirect fire) for this reporting period occurred in Kunar Province.

37. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border disputes remain a source of tension. ISAF continues to explore ways to improve the relationship between the Afghan security forces and the Pakistani military.

VII. Implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1612 (2005)

38. ISAF continues to account for and support the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1612 (2005).

(a) Resolution 1325 (2000) (Women and peace and security)

Afghan elections

39. A number of presidential candidates attended a women's advocacy conference in Kabul in January, organized by the Women's Political Rights and Advocacy Group, in which they stressed the importance of an expanded role for women in public life in Afghanistan and improvement in the way women's rights are protected by the law.

40. The Independent Electoral Commission recently conducted its sixth coordination meeting with women's organizations, aiming to increase female participation in the upcoming Afghan elections. The Commission's Chief Executive Officer requested all civil society, governmental and non-governmental organizations to encourage eligible women to apply for positions on the Commission.

Gender integration within the Afghan security institutions

41. The recruitment of women in the Afghan security forces and of female searchers for the elections is an issue. Under the leadership of the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, steps are being taken to better protect and empower women police and women staff of the Ministry. The Ministry continues to work towards its goal of recruiting and training a total of 10,000 female officers. Recent initiatives include the appointment of the first woman district police chief, who is now leading the First Police District in Kabul. There is also progress in the initiatives and leadership of the Ministry of Defence, which is shaping its relations with relevant actors and stakeholders to further develop gender integration, and for the implementation of its latest approved policies, such as the Human Rights and Gender Integration Directorate Working Plan 2013-2016 and the Female Management Accession Policy.

Assessment

42. Female recruitment is key to maintaining international funding and the legitimacy of the Afghan security forces among the population. The lack of policewomen prevents Afghan women from reporting harassment and abuse.

43. Lack of progress by the Government towards fully meeting commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework concerning human rights and elimination of violence against women is a concern. It is vital for the continued support of the international community that the Government continues to show improvements and results on gender-related topics.

(b) Resolution 1612 (2005) (Children in armed conflict)

44. Afghan children continue to be recruited and used by armed groups, notably the Taliban. They help to manufacture and plant improvised explosive devices, and to transport provisions. In addition, children have been recruited to conduct suicide attacks.

45. In order to minimize the number of civilian casualties, ISAF continues to implement systems of technical, tactical and procedural checks. This has had positive results; the number of children who have died or who have been wounded has dropped.

46. Focal points on children in armed conflict have been appointed throughout the NATO military chain of command.

VIII. Conclusion

47. Afghanistan has entered a decisive year, preparing for the "Decade of transformation". The Commander of ISAF remains confident in the capability of the Afghan security forces to secure the elections and the subsequent governmental transition. The 2014 elections and peaceful transition of power will mark a historic change. Their success will build the foundation for a stable and legitimate government.

48. After the end of the ISAF mission in December 2014, some shortfalls and capability gaps in the Afghan security forces and Afghan security institutions will remain. As a priority ISAF is taking steps to mitigate those shortfalls and gaps in order to secure a long-term self-sustainability of the Afghan security forces and security institutions.

49. A continuing and comprehensive international commitment to Afghanistan after 2014 must provide both sufficient funding for the Afghan security forces and sufficient troops to conduct the training, advise and assist mission currently being planned by NATO. With this international help, the Afghan forces will be sustained and the political and military institutions of Afghanistan will be strengthened.